

The HHC XO

Tips on Organizing a Tough Job With Responsibility for a Lot of Equipment

by Captain David A. Smith

One of the most difficult, and probably the least glamorous job, for an armor lieutenant in an armor battalion is the headquarters and headquarters company executive officer. He is responsible for the maintenance of over 130 vehicles of all different types and configurations. He is also responsible for monitoring supply matters for a company of over 300 and hundreds of property book lines. I was an HHC XO after being a tank company XO for 11 months. I had a good idea what a tank company XO did because I watched my XO while I was a platoon leader. The HHC XO job was one that I was less prepared to take and, therefore, I learned a lot on the job.

The first thing I learned was to use the personnel in the company. A tank company is really not that big, so I used to get away with doing some tasks myself or getting maintenance status straight from the tank commanders. The size of the headquarters company made that impossible. Personnel in the company have a wealth of experience. Your scout platoon leader was probably one of the best tank platoon leaders before he took the scouts, so he should be able to help you keep the scouts squared away. Your support platoon leader is usually an experienced lieutenant who can also help. In some sections, the leader is often occupied with other issues, so it is easier to find a point of contact for maintenance and supply issues. This does not necessarily have to be the leader of the section, but it has to be a responsible individual who can talk intelligently about the information you need. A competent point of contact in each section will make it easier to track status of the company.

The second thing I learned was that an HHC has much more property than a tank company. I was blessed with an

excellent supply sergeant who ran a well organized supply room. If it is possible, the HHC commander should try and get the best supply sergeant in the battalion into the HHC supply room. If the HHC supply sergeant is overcome by the size of the HHC, then



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the XO will have to spend more time helping with the supply room.

The first step is to organize. Find enough black binders for each section that has a hand receipt. Gather the section's hand receipts together and put them in the binder. Use document protectors to separate the hand receipts in the binder. Put a number on each binder. Next, go through each line number in the property book and, next to the item, put the number of the binder where the hand receipt is kept. If you ever need to inventory a particular item, look in the property book and

see, by binder number, which sections are signed for the items.

The second step is to ruthlessly inventory. Using the monthly ten percent inventory is the best way to keep track of the company property. The XO should help the commander by organizing these inventories ahead of his arrival, so all he has to do is look at a layout. The XO should locate all the property and set a layout time with the sections being inventoried. To keep the company property in order, the XO must follow through after the inventory and account for shortages. This is not the time to let hand receipt holders say, "Give me a few days, I'll find what I lost." The HHC has too much property, and it is very easy to forget about a lost wrench. The biggest supply headaches for the HHC XO are the sets, kits, and outfits (SKO). A HHC has many end items with component listings that are pages long. Soldiers can even make the equipment operate for years without some parts that were

lost by a previous hand receipt holder. The trouble comes when you try to turn in that end item and the receiving agent wants it complete. Since you have all the battalion's mechanics, you also have all the tool boxes that go with them. The XO should stress to the mechanics to keep accountability of their tools or expect to pay for them. After conducting all inventories, update the shortage annexes and complete the adjustment documents.

The next thing I learned was that maintenance in the HHC is not as easy to perform as in a tank company. A

tank company will have at least two soldiers per tank to pull maintenance. Maintaining the tank is part of fighting the tank, so plenty of time is allocated to PMCS. The scout platoon is similar to the tank platoon because a scout also depends on his vehicle to do his job. The mortar platoon's maintenance problems centered on the age of their equipment. The M106s we had were over 25 years old and some of the mortar tubes were fabricated in the 1950s. Also, some mortar soldiers came from a light division background and were not familiar with track maintenance. The medical platoon might also be a problem. Medics do not spend very much time on maintenance training because they, as they should, spend more time in medical training. The medical platoon leader in my HHC admitted that he had only a few hours of PMCS training at his basic course. He was willing to learn, but it was hard to rely on him when it came to maintenance matters. The cooks were another problem. Cooks are up early preparing breakfast, and after that, they start on lunch. Their real-world mission of feeding the troops three meals a day does not leave much time to work on their trucks or MKTs. The battalion staff vehicles can be easily neglected. The drivers of the staff vehicles often have other jobs at battalion headquarters, so they do not see the motor pool very often. Battalion staff officers will claim they have more pressing matters for their soldiers to do besides maintenance. Sometimes this is true, but they will need their tracks for the next field exercise, so some maintenance needs to be done. Believe it or not, the worst maintained vehicles in the battalion are often the maintenance team vehicles. The maintenance team spends all of its time repairing everyone else's equipment and has little time to PMCS its own. During command maintenance, the mechanics spend all the time fixing their company's vehi-



cles, leaving little time for their own maintenance.

How do you fix these problems? First and most important is a ruthlessly enforced Command Maintenance. The best way we found to control Command Maintenance was to have a battalion-level formation at battalion headquarters and then march the entire battalion to the motor pool. Commanders were the only ones who could authorize any absence. Command emphasis is extremely important. My battalion commander would walk through headquarters on Command Maintenance day and clear out everyone to the motor pool. This kind of emphasis makes the XO's job much easier. Ensure that during Command Maintenance, everyone is working on their own vehicles, including the mechanics. This might cause some friction with line companies, but you must make your mechanics off limits to allow them to work on their own vehicles. The afternoon of Command Maintenance is a good time to have maintenance meetings. Arrange a time for each section to meet with you and the maintenance team chief. This is an important face to face meeting to work out problems before mechanic work is scheduled.

The second way to help fix your maintenance problems is to go down on your line and look at the vehicles. Take a look at a HMMWV that doesn't look like it has been started in months; try and start it. Look at tire pressure and vehicle serviceability. Get a 5988E for a vehicle and do a PMCS. Check to see if parts are on order or if parts have been in the parts bin for two months. After a few months, you will know

which vehicles are routinely neglected. Give the section a heads-up on the potential problems. Sometimes you might need help from the battalion XO to force sections to fix problems, but do this as a last resort.

The HHC is a huge unit. The best advice I can give is not to be intimidated by its size and just get to work. After a few weeks, you will know which areas need more attention. Get to know the platoon leaders; ask them what their problems are, and what help they need. Take advantage of the soldiers from different MOSs; learn new things from them; you will get a chance to see the Army from their perspective. My battalion maintenance sergeant had a quote up in the motor pool that I think emphasizes the importance of the HHC. "The HHC might not be the PRIDE of the battalion, but without the HHC the PRIDE DON'T RIDE." Being the HHC XO is a tough job, but the kind of job that Army officers should aspire to.

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